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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2016

TAGS: PGOV KJUS KCRM PTER UNMIK VI

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: RAIL LINE CONNECTING SOUTHERN SERB ENCLAVES AND MITROVICA DAMAGED IN EXPLOSION

Classified By: COM TINA KAI DANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Kosovo Police Service (KPS) and local media reported an explosion on a railroad bridge near the town of Vushtrri on a line that serves Kosovo's Serb community. The explosion damaged tracks and temporarily disrupted rail service, but no injuries were reported. A train carrying about a dozen Serbs was scheduled to cross the bridge an hour after the explosion. Freedom of movement is a key issue for the Kosovo Serb community, and this incident will deepen their unease, particularly if the perpetrators are not brought to justice. The COM used a media opportunity in Serb-majority North Mitrovica to condemn the incident and has also raised it with Kosovar leaders and UNMIK officials. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Kosovo Police Service (KPS) and Kosovo media reported that an explosion occurred on the Ura e Frenkut Bridge in Vushtrri municipality's Mihaliq village at about 1700 on December 8. The explosion damaged the railroad tracks, temporarily disrupting rail traffic in northern Kosovo. As a result of the incident, a train carrying a dozen Serbs from Mitrovica toward the enclaves south of the Ibar River was stopped in Vushtrri and the passengers were transported to their destinations by bus. The train would have crossed the bridge a little over an hour after the explosion. No injuries were reported, and UNMIK Railways is operating on a normal schedule again.

¶3. (C) Willie Hayward (protect) of UNMIK CIVPOL's Department of Crime told poloff that French KFOR personnel heard the explosion and responded immediately. An Albanian villager also reported it to the police. Hayward said UNMIK CIVPOL's counter-terrorist unit and the KPS have formed a working group to investigate the incident. According to Hayward, no witnesses have come forward, no one has claimed responsibility for the incident, and the explosive device, which appeared homemade, gave no clues as to who was responsible. Hayward said that the device was placed at the edge of the bridge and was not intended to blow up the bridge, but to do just enough damage to the tracks to cause the train to derail and fall into the river. Hayward pointed out that the explosion occurred just before nightfall and

that if authorities had not responded to the scene and halted rail traffic, the conductor would probably not have spotted the damage in time to avert a derailment. He said the device only knocked rocks out of place and the tracks onto one another, so the damage would not have been visible from a distance, especially in the dark.

¶13. (SBU) A similar incident occurred on April 12, 2003. Two Albanian National Army (AKSH) members, who were also members of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), blew themselves up while trying to mine the bridge near Zvecan over which a trains connecting Serbia and Kosovo pass. The AKSH claimed responsibility for the explosion, and UNMIK responded by designating it a terrorist organization.

¶14. (SBU) COMMENT: The Mihaliq explosion is disturbing because Kosovo Serbs frequently use this rail line and believe that it is one of the safest ways for them to travel between enclaves south of the Ibar River and Serb majority areas in northern Kosovo. Failure by law enforcement (the KPS and UNMIK CIVPOL) to find the perpetrators would further undermine Serbs' and other minorities' confidence in the ability of Kosovo authorities to protect their rights, including their freedom of movement. The COM has raised these issues with UNMIK senior officials and with Kosovar authorities, urging them to intensify efforts to find the perpetrators and condemn such incidents publicly.

¶15. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.  
KAIDANOW